

Yuusha no Furi mo Raku Janai–Riyuu?

Ore ga Kami dakara–

Arc 5: Hero's Adventures - East

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Chapter 96: Tax collector and departure (Arc 5 Start)

I've already taken down three of the Four Heavenly Kings.
I prevented a war instigated by the demons in the Fabrica kingdom
and freed the fairy Haya from slavery. After that, I returned to
Keika Village and developed it, secured a future for the elves and
helped the beastfolks.

I let the Mother Earth God Lupersia descend at the harvest festival
and let Lapisia meet her mother.
I've even gathered a lot of believers.
It's morning at Keika Village.
I was preparing for departure at the mansion.
I had received a report from Leo, that the vampire - the Hell King
- who was living in a swamp in the southeast of the kingdom had one
of the eggs.
I'll finish him off and then go to the neighboring continent.
Well, even if I say preparation, I was just stuffing some food,
medicine and blankets into a bag to carry on my shoulder.
While doing so, Fal, who was wearing her habit, peeked in.
"Keika-sama. The mayor and the tax collector have arrived. They are
waiting in the reception room."
"Tax collector? Thank you. I'll go immediately."
I tilted my head while I headed to the reception room, wondering
what this is about.
Heroes don't have to pay any taxes.
It doesn't make sense to hinder the heroes' activities to
exterminate the Demon Lord.
The sofa is facing the table in the reception room and a carpet is
spread out. The interior is still rather plainly decorated.

The mayor and a man in a gaudy dress were sitting on the sofa.

The mayor stands up.

"Good morning, Keika-sama. I'm sorry for the sudden visit when you're busy."

I ask while I sit down.

"Did something happen?"

"This person is the tax collector Tiack."

The good-looking young man looks at me with a smile.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Hero-sama. My name is Tiack Milford.

I came to this village to calculate the tax for the harvest, but something bothered me so I came by."

Tiack seemed somewhat aristocratic, and his behavior and manner of speech were courteous.

I on the other hand just wanted to get over this quickly since I was about to set off.

"So, what's the matter?"

"I've heard that you are selling 'talismans', right? You can't sell them at this village unless you pay the charge for the shop and the tax on the sold goods."

"I see. How much would that be?"

"I don't know how high the profit is, but it should be about 46 big gold coins for everything. With this I'll turn a blind eye to you doing business without permission."

He had an unpleasant, faint smile floating on his face. He's even implicitly implying that I should hand over some hush money.

It's not like I can't pay, but I don't feel like paying him.

I have to gather 50.000 believers to defeat the Demon Lord and what I'm doing at this village are necessary expenses, hence it would be strange to pay taxes for that in the first place.

That's why I shook my head.

"I don't have to pay this because I'm not doing any business."

"Wh-What are you saying!? I just looked and you already have a sales stand in the garden!"

"Everything I do is in order to defeat the Demon Lord as a hero. I'm not selling them in the first place. The received money are donations to aid in my activities and not profits."

"Such, bullshit... Even a hero can't say whatever he wants!"

"Heh. Then, how about we go to King Daphnes and ask him if I'm wrong or not? I don't even need an appointment to meet him."

"Ah, no!? ...this is..."

He has a flattering smile on his face while he is impatient.

I distort the corners of my mouth and prepare for the decisive blow.

"You don't have to hold back, you know? Well then, shall we go? You might even leave a good impression to the king if you're correct.

'The aristocrat Tiack Milford is so enthusiastic that he even turns a blind eye.' Very Well, Let's go!"

Tiack stands up while acting suspiciously.

"No~ *ahaha*. We don't have to go just to confirm that, if I just know the circumstances there's no problem *ahaha*. Then please do your best to eliminate the demons."

Tiack went out of the reception room.

The mayor chases after him in a panic.

"Tiack-sama!? --Keika-sama, please excuse me. --Please wait, Tiack-sama!"

The reception room becomes quiet.

I followed Tiack with "Clairvoyance" and "Attentive Ears" as he leaves the mansion.

"Shit, that's why I hate country bumpkins who have only their idiotic strength! They get full of themselves if you just behave a little modest. I'll remember that!"

Tiack headed to a horse-drawn carriage with big steps.

"I can only hear the howling of a loser... tell me that right to my face."

He looked like a stray dog that is driven away no matter how many times he came.

"Maybe I should tell the villagers that they should let me know if they receive harassment..."

I was thinking about these things while I went back to my room when a rectangular hole opened in the wall and a rainbow-colored light pours out of it.

The four heads tall fairy Haya comes out.

"Keika-san, Keika-san. The demon-detecting statue is ready."

"Oh--, is it ready? Is it life-sized?

"Yes-, just like the original."

"Then, please tell either Rii or Fioria to bring it to Roni Village."

"Roger-! What's with the remaining?"

I didn't know what she was speaking about for a moment, so I asked back.

--Hm? Remaining? What do you mean by 'remaining'?"

"There are ten remaining."

"You didn't make only one?!! --Ah, I see. I didn't specify the number."

"Was that wrong? I thought that you'd distribute them to a lot of villages."

She looks at me with her round eyes.

"Hmm, just distributing the statues wouldn't automatically lead to

an increase of believers. --No, rumors about Roni Village might spread and the people who want a demon detecting statue might increase. You can give them to other villages if they say that they want one."

"Yeees"

Haya passed through the fairy door at the wall and disappeared somewhere.

=====

The preparations were done after a while and everyone departed from the residence.

We're heading east along the irrigation channel with about twenty people.

There are my and Leo's party and beastfolks who are lending a hand to carry the huge wheels - paddle steamer wheels.

I planned to bring them to Doruas on the river.

Lapisia was paving the road at my request while we were heading to the large river for several hours.

The river is deep, about 50 meters wide and is calmly flowing.

When I looked down from the embankment, there were already eight Naga of about five meter length.

The white skin of leturia stands out.

"It's been a while, Keika-sama."

"You also look well, leturia."

Dhalia turns around and speaks.

"Everyone from the Naga tribe is living happily. I'm really grateful."

"That's good to hear. --So, as planned, please deliver these wheels to the port town Doruas."

"Leave it to us."

I and Lapisia carefully took the wheels and gently dropped them onto the water surface.

There are three Naga per paddle wheel.

The beastfolks are making noise.

"He-Hey. They're lifting those heavy wheels with just two people"

"That's a hero for you..."

Leo murmurs while he smiles wryly.

"Keika-san never fails to surprise!"

"Rather than surprise, it's unbelievable."

Tilt shook his head, indicating "Good grief".

After that the beastfolks parted ways with us and my and Leo's party are boarding ships.

"Well then, Leo, I'll leave the ship modifications to you."

"Please leave it to us, Keika-san."

I had asked Leo's party to take care of the paddle steamer construction.

I can't let Haya supervise it after all.

Ieturia, who was pulling the ship that we had boarded, spoke.

"Then, Keika-sama. Shall I speed up?"

"Yes, please do so."

"Hold on tightly."

Ieturia turned her white body. The tip of her tail was slapping on the water surface.

The speed of the ship rises quickly.

The high-speed ship was slightly modified so it wouldn't shake that much.

With the addition of the downstream we advanced as if we'd glide.

Lapisia was smiling over her whole face as she looked at the scenery that was passing by at high speed.

=====

A few hours have passed since we passed the capital.

We arrived at the eastern coast about the time when the sun was going down.

"Is it fine here?"

"Yes, it's fine."

Lapisia jumped off with a big jump. Her white dress flutters. She's followed by Minya, whose Miko clothes are waving. After that I followed.

Celica's legs were staggering when she got off.

A took her hand and embraced her when it looked like she was about to fall.

"Are you alright?"

"Au...the ship was shaking quite a bit..."

She murmured in my arms. She casts her eyes down and her face is red.

Ieturia comes to the water surface and speaks.

"Humans have it hard, huh..."

"It couldn't be helped since we were in a hurry."

"Shall I pick you up again a week?"

"I heard that the wetlands are three days from here. Please act on that assumption."

"Understood. Well, even if the time is slightly off, you should be able to simply stop any ship since I've told all my companions about you. --There are five a day."

"I'll do that."

"Well then, please take care."

Ieturia pulled the ship and proceeded south.

Then we headed east.

At sunset we arrived at the village of Yobu.

It's a small village with about 30 houses.

We lodge at the village headman's house.

For some reason I received a warm welcome when I told that I'm the

hero.

The village headman speaks while we're having dinner.

"Thank you very much for exterminating the demons the other day."

"We didn't know what would become of the harvest." "You saved the village."

He voices words of gratitude.

But I can't remember that at all.

Then the village headman spoke.

"But you're not wearing your masks today, huh."

"Eh? --Yes, we don't have to be discreet against the demons anymore."

It hit me when he asked about the masks.

--It's Leo.

I asked him to give his achievements to me, but to think that he acts while concealing his identity with a mask...

No wonder why the women at the village said things like "So this it what your face looks like, Keika-sama."

Just how much has Leo shown off during his activities?

Just by imagining that I was strangely embarrassed.

Celica's blond hair was swaying while she was giggling.

Chapter 97: The king of hell

We traveled for three days.

We headed to our destination, the wetlands where the Hell King, who

has one of the eggs, lives.

I received a warm welcome by the villages we passed through as the

hero who helped them while wearing a mask.

I'm happy that I'm worshiped as a hero, but it's kind of

embarrassing to be called "Masked hero".

I couldn't get rid of the feeling that maybe it was some kind of

harassment by Dark.

We walked cautiously through the wetlands.

At first the water is shallow and then it becomes a quagmire of

mud. It's overgrown with grass that is as tall as a person.

Since we started to sink into the mud as we advanced, I decided to

use magic that let us walk on the water.

Thanks to that we were able to continue.

When we went deep into the wetlands, it began to smell like the

unpleasant stench of rotten eggs.

Celica's beautiful face distorted and she spoke.

"This is, a poisonous swamp. It corrodes wood and iron alike. She

should be careful not to touch it."

"Just the smell alone seems to be bad-- 'Wind Zone'"

I chanted magic and the party was engulfed in a stream of fresh

wind.

As we moved further through the swamp, the signs of life

vanished.

This place probably isn't approachable by people usually.

About the time the eerie feeling became the strongest, a castle

appeared ahead.

There is a small hill in the swamp and the hill's slope turns into a cliff. There stood a castle that looked like it was halfway buried.

When I looked at it with "Clairvoyance", a tunnel was leading inside the cliff.

There were four gatekeepers in front of the castle. When taking a closer look, they have weapons and are wearing armor. I looked at them with "Truth Sight" while we were hiding in the thicket.

A human, two beastfolks and one demon.

I'll omit the status since they're all weak.

It seemed that the demon was the leader.

"Hmm". I was slightly troubled while I looked at the gatekeepers.

There's a possibility that the human and the beastfolks are forced to obey.

They might become believers if I'd just take down the boss.

Celica speaks while we're hidden in the grass.

"What should we do, Keika-sama?"

"They're weak and it'd be troublesome otherwise, so let's march into it from the front. Simply take out the demon without killing the human and the beastfolks-- no, maybe that's a little difficult.

Please just make everyone faint."

It should be enough if I'd take out the demon.

"Yes, we'll do as you say."

Celica nodded and grasped the handle of her slender sword that hangs from her waist.

Minya holds her two knives without saying anything.

Lapisia, who is carrying the "Create Hammer", clutches her

fist.

"Hold back punch!"

--Will she punch with her hand that's holding the hammer?

We slip out of the thicket and imposingly approach the

castle.

The gatekeepers are making a commotion when they see us briskly walking on the wetlands.

"S-Something is coming!" "hi!, they're walking on the water!?"

"I'll tell the lord!"

The demon went into the castle.

Only the human and the beastfolks remain. They are preparing their spears and sword while they are trembling.

I spoke while we dashed forward.

"They are a human and beastfolks! You only have to make them faint."

"Yes!

"Understood."

I rushed over to the human in an instant.

"Wh-Who are you!?"

"I'm the hero Keika."

"Hii! Hero! Uwaa!"

Just by telling my name, the human gatekeeper dropped his sword and is escaping into the castle.

The beastfolks though seem to be confident in their strength and take fighting postures.

First, Celica waves her red skirt and dashes to the deerfolk with horns.

She nimbly evades the lunged spear and releases a sharp thrust.

"Ya!"

The point of her sword inflicts a shallow injury to his arm.

Immediately the effect of the Frozen Rapier activates and ice springs forth from the cut.

"Wh-What?"

The beastfolk raised a surprised voice but his movements have already become stiff.

Celica used the time to circle around him and hit his back while letting her blond hair swiftly sway.

"Gua!"

A dull sound echoes and the beastfolk crumbles down on the sport.

Minya's Miko clothes are fluttering as she dashes forward.

Her opponent is an elephantfolk who holds a mace. He's quite well built.

"A catfolk? ...How impudent!"

The mace emits wind pressure as it is swirled around.

Minya's white robe and black skirt are dancing as they flutter.

Then, the elephantfolk's posture collapsed when she warded the mace off with her kitchen knives.

Minya's left hand aims at his neck.

"Naive!"

While the elephantfolk is collapsed on the ground, he entangles the hand with his long nose.

"Hm"

She's lifted up.

However, Minya isn't done yet.

She pulls herself upwards with a circling movement on the caught arm and performs an agile jump.

She uses the momentum of the rotation to kick the back of the elephantfolk's head.

With a dull sound, the elephantfolk falls to his knees with

upturned eyes.

She stretches her slender legs and nimbly lands.

"That's it!"

"Well done, everyone. Let's go while keeping the high spirits."

"Yes!"

We climb over the fainted gatekeepers and entered the castle. A red carpet was laid out in the dimly lit entrance. Only some

magical lamps were put up here and there.

Thick stone pillars supported the ceiling and a wide staircase was in the back.

There were no signs of any enemies.

When we approached, a demon was coming down the stairs. He was about half the size of a human and unseemly like a goblin.

However, he wore something like a butler's uniform with a bow tie.

When he arrived half way down the stairs, he bowed and looked at us.

"Thank you very much for your visit. I suppose you are the hero."

He has a courteous attitude. Although his voice is hoarse, it's quite shrill.

I speak while I stay alert.

"I heard that someone called the 'Hell King' lives here."

"He now goes by the title of 'Hell Lord'."

"Whatever. Where is he?"

"Yes. He's this way."

He pointed at a large door on the second floor in a courteous manner.

"You're remarkably honest, huh?"

"Yes. I was told that the lord would rather confront the hero himself then leave it to his subordinates."

"That's a wise decision."

"Yes. The lord is a very wise person-- well then, this way please."

The dressed demon started to walk ahead with unsteady steps.

We slowly followed him and climbed the stairs.

Celica got close to me and spoke in a low voice.

"Might this be a trap?"

"Relax. I'll notice it if there are any traps."

"As expected of you, Keika-sama. You're reliable."

Even though she says this, she holds onto my clothes. Maybe she's frightened.

There were demons and humans hiding in different rooms, but all of them were weak when I looked with "Truth Sight", so I walked without any concerns.

When we passed through a double door on the second floor, we walked along a corridor and arrived at another large door.

The demon knocked at the door, and with the eerie sound of *squeak*, the door opened.

The demon lowered his head next to the door.

I puffed up my chest and entered boldly.

The inside looked like a spacious throne room with a high ceiling.

There's an elevation in front with a gorgeous throne. Nobody is sitting on it.

The whole hall was dimly lit.

Probably because the Hell Lord is a vampire.

There weren't any traps even when I looked at the floor or the ceiling.

There were only some people and demons who appeared to be guards in

the direction of the pillars.
I couldn't see the Hell Lord.
His status was displayed though.
His status was like this.

[Status]

Name: Desperado

Gender: Male

Race: Arch Vampire (Devil)

Job: Marquis

Class: Mage Lv96, Feudal Lord Lv70

Attributes: "True Demon" "Impure Land" "Frozen Wind"

Attack strength: 2500

Defense strength: 3000

Vitality: 6800

Mental strength: 2700

[Skills]

Energy Drain: Absorb Attack strength and Vitality from the opponent

just by touching. When the opponent is already shedding blood, it
can be absorbed from a distance.

Sonic Blade: Bring forth a blade of wind to chop enemies.

Metamorphose: Change into an animal. Abilities aren't
effected.

Freezing Blizzard: Freeze a group for several seconds. Range
attack.

Death Count: Counts to zero when proclaiming a death sentence and
when it reaches zero it drains the blood and kills the
opponent.

Lesser Servant: Turns those who got their blood sucked into
vampires.

Evil Sabbath: Instantly kills all friends and foes alike and
absorbs their energy. Large range magic.

A vampire and moreover a devil.
He's pretty strong. You could take him for the Demon Lord at first glance.
The skills are quite troublesome. Not only the instant death and so on, but also the Energy Drain is dangerous.
I and Lapisia are fine, but Celica and Minya are in danger.
He doesn't seem to have the egg with him, so I should defeat him as soon as he told me where it is.

However, for some reason the Hell Lord was right overhead the throne.

At first I thought it might be some magic but apparently he stuck to a dark curtain and hid behind it. He covered his face like a bat with his mantle and hung from the ceiling.

--What does he do there?

We advanced cautiously.

For now I just told Celica about it in a whisper since it might be a trap.

Then, when we arrived before the throne, the lights in the hall suddenly went off.

Only the throne is illuminated by a spotlight.

--Then.

A voice could be heard throughout the room. The voice echoes.

"Fuhahaha! How brave of you to come here, Hero! I am the Hell Lord! It's my privilege to create this world's hell!"

Pika!

Lightning-like sparks shone on the elevation.

The lightning occurred two times, three times. Furthermore, white smoke comes from the sides of the elevation.

Then, together with the fourth lighting, the Hell Lord appeared in

the air above the throne.

He floated in midair and spread his mantle while bathing in the spotlight. It's a black tailcoat. His expression shows his brutal canines. From the looks, he's a slim, middle-aged man of about 40 years.

"*Fuhaha*, tremble from terror! Cry and scream from fear! You can mourn about coming here! *Fuhahahaha*...what's this, it seems rather badly received, huh?"

The Hell Lord frowned when he saw that we weren't surprised and simply stood there discouraged.

He looks disappointed when he sits down on the throne.

I spoke.

"That's quite the cliched entrance..."

"That's right. The theater troupe from the capital was flashier."

"I wasn't surprised because I knew that he was above."

While we gave harsh critics, only Lapisia's eyes were sparkling.

"It shone so bright, so cool!"

The Hell Lord opens his mouth wide and laughs.

"I see! You weren't frightened because I looked too cool! It was a blind spot, *fuhahahaha*!"

He threw his head back and laughed loudly while sitting on the throne.

--What a positive way of thinking...

I spoke while scratching my head from amazement.

"Rather than that, you are the Hell Lord, right?"

"That's right! This me is the personification of the fear in the darkness, a true vampire!"

"Where is the egg that you got from the Demon Lord?"

"Egg? Ah, that. I have it, so what?"

"Hand it over"

"I can't do that. It'd be a problem if I'd betray the Demon Lord.

You'll die here anyway, so it wouldn't matter even if you had it."

"Do you think so?"

I prepared myself to draw my Tachi.

The Hell Lord stands up and takes a daunting pose.

"Kukuku, I look forward how long you can keep up that bluff! I'll show you my hell!"

"Heh, that's just what I want! --Here I go!"

The moment when I wanted to rush over, the Hell Lord flew to a door in the back.

--Hm, why?

I took a look with "Clairvoyance" but there was just a passage.

The Hell Lord opened the door and turned around.

"What are you doing? Come quickly."

"Hm? Are we changing place?"

"You're going to take a look at my hell, right? Look around this hell that I created and then shake in fear! *Fuhahahaha*"

"Ah--, so that's what you mean?..."

Isn't he going to fight? Does he want us to see the people who are suffering in hell?

"What should we do?"

"It doesn't seem to be a trap...it might be advantageous to learn about the internal structure of the castle."

When Celica and I were looking at each other, the Hell Lord spoke with an irritated voice.

"What's wrong? The working hours will be over if you're not hurrying up!"

"Why does the hell have working hours?"

No way, it won't be something like a theme park-like hell,

right?... Who knows..."

My head was thrown into confusion.

Celica frowns with her cute brows.

"It doesn't seem like we have any other choice but to follow him
until we know where the egg is..."

"You're right. We can only find it if we're looking around. --Don't
leave my side!"

"Yes!"

"Understood."

We climbed the elevation and headed to the door where the Hell Lord
was waiting.

Chapter 98: This world's hell!

Guided by the Hell Lord - a true ancestor vampire - we walked into the castle.

To look around the hell that he had created.

I planned to look for the egg with "Clairvoyance" in the meantime.

The Hell Lord's mantle sways as he walks ahead.

The four of us are walking behind him in succession.

Celica speaks anxiously.

"Just, where on earth does he take us...?"

"Maybe he plans to make us shudder up by showing us something extremely cruel..."

Is there torture or forced labor?

The Hell Lord turns back.

"That's exactly it! You should tremble in fear! *Kuahahaha!*"

He loudly laughed while waving his mantle.

For now, I invoked some magic in a way that the Hell Lord wouldn't notice.

It's a magic to protect from instant death.

The Hell Lord has two instant death attacks, hence I put them on

Celica, Minya and Lapisia.

I was okay because I was protected from instant death thanks to the Fairy's Blessing.

I'll give them some accessories with the effect of instant death invalidation later when there's some time to spare.

When we passed through the long passage, we arrived outside under the warm sun.

The castle was erected at the cliff of the hill and the inside of the hill was hollowed out.

It's similar to a caldera. The surrounding hill has become a natural protective wall.

It was quite spacious with a radius of maybe one kilometer.

People were harvesting a field and domesticated animals were kept.

There are several large buildings.

The Hell Lord turned around and had a dreadful smile floating on his face.

"How's that! Isn't it dreadful?"

"...it's a hidden village, huh. Rather, are you fine being exposed to the sun with you being a vampire?"

"I'm a true ancestor after all and don't have any weak points..., so, isn't this dreadful? I implemented all the means and strategies I know of to make them despair. *Fuhaha!*"

The Hell Lord was laughing loud. I thought for a moment that his pride is maybe his biggest weak point.

There were people who were working the field, people who were milking cows, people who were shearing sheep and people who were making cheese among others. Humans, beastfolks and demons were working.

They don't seem to be subjected to harsh manual labor.

Since the Hell Lord seemed to await my impression, I spoke.

"Isn't this normal? It doesn't look like a harsh environment..."

"Kukuku! My dreadfulness can't be seen with the eyes. That's why it's a real hell!"

He spread his arms, throwing his mantle backward.

I tilt my head.

"Aren't you whipping or torturing them?"

"Well, I don't do that anymore. When thinking about it, wouldn't that kill them after a short time?"

"Hm?"

"I can easily kill people. I could kill them in an instant like plucking fruits. But would that really give them fear? Rather, wouldn't I just guide them to the peaceful afterlife from this harsh world?"

The Hell Lord speaks while looking at his hands.

"I see. Death might be a salvation, huh."

"Yes! Exactly, Hero! That's why I thought that tying them to this world and letting them slowly wither away would be the most dreadful."

"Well, I can't say that I don't understand it. However, it seems pretty idyllic though."

"You're naive, Hero! The dreadfulness is that you can't see it at first glance! First is the field. It has to be worked 14 hours a day, but the people only work eight hours. --In other words, it's a two shift system!"

"Heh"

"Furthermore, they have two days off a week. That way they can restore their worn out bodies so they won't escape from this living hell!"

"That's also why you organized the shift system?"

"That's not all! I even implemented a plan to throw them from hope into despair every month."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm paying them wages! However, now comes the deal, I then deduct from the seemingly huge amount of money bit by bit. At the end they are trembling from terror when they see how little ends up within their purses!"

"Are you deducting things like rent or food expenses?"

"Naive! There's more! --Look at that!"

The Hell Lord pointed at beastfolks, who were carried on stretchers.

They were the gatekeeper deerfolk and elephantfolk that we knocked out.

They are carried into a building.

"What's over there?"

"A hospital! So they won't sneak away from this hell with a sweet death granted by injuries or illnesses. Moreover, injuries at work are paid from the deducted money. That way they'll buy their friends' enmity if it's paid with their money. *Fuhaha*, how's that, isn't this dreadful!?"

"You have a worker's accident insurance!? H-How frightening!"

"*Hehe*, it seems you get my dreadfulness a little now, huh?"

"*Kukuku*", he laughed while showing his shining canines.

When we were about to pass a place where wood was processed, a single goblin approached and prostrated himself.

"Lord-sama! I'm terribly sorry!"

"What happened?"

"My wife got pregnant! The expected date is in three month!"

"Whaaat!? Both of you are forbidden to work two months before and after the delivery. And you'll suffer together as a couple, having your wages halved! *Fuhahaha*"

"As you command, it's really dreadful, Lord-sama!"

The goblin smiled while shedding tears.

I shuddered from fear.

"Isn't that maternity leave?! Moreover, with half payment...! H-How dreadful!"

"How's that, how's that!? Everyone here lives stricken by fear!"

We arrived at the hospital building that the beastfolks have been brought into.

It's a large two-story building.

There, people and beastfolks were waiting in a queue in front of the entrance.

Celica tilts her head.

"Ehm, Lord-sama. What's that queue? No one of them looks injured or sick..."

"Kukuku, blood is taken from them! It'll become a food source for me and the demons!"

I crossed my arms and nodded.

"In other words, you're keeping the working people as livestock.

That's finally something that seems like hell."

"Hehe", the Hell Lord laughed scornfully.

"Did you think that was all? It's not over with just having their blood taken once every year in rotation. The blood is then examined for abnormalities and illnesses! If something is found they are immediately hospitalized to make sure that they won't receive the comfort of death! How's that, do you give up!?"

"Isn't that an annual medical examination!? You're going even that far!?"

"Hehe, are you scared?"

"This is... dreadful!"

As a result of letting them live long to experience the agony of this world to its maximum, he gives them excellent treatment like a company with a welfare program.

It's better managed than Keika Village. It's a little vexing.

After that there were things like a smithy and a glass manufactory.

There were painters and people making ceramic art.

Furthermore we saw people playing instruments during orchestra

practice.

Celica speaks.

"Nevertheless, you have quite a lot of different jobs, huh? There are even craftsmen who work with glass and musicians."

"Kukuku. That's also something I thought up. What will they do if everything they lived for is taken from them!?"

"Hm?"

"It doesn't make sense to let everyone work on the field like slaves. Anyone can do that once they get used to it. I realized that humans will despair the most when I let them do the work that makes best use of their innate abilities! Humans grow old. Just how much despair will they feel at the time they've grown old and their talents are running dry! Isn't that dreadful!"

"Th-That's truly dreadful... you even have freedom of job selection. Moreover, you're investigating their innate talents?"

"Of course! I also have a place to teach them the jobs."

"What...!?"

Certainly, if you do a job that makes good use of your talents, it'll double your joy but the despair will also be deep if you are unable to do it.

But everyone who is working has sparks in their eyes. They work while being happy that they can do what they want.

After that we further looked around the hell.

People have gathered in front of a building that looked like an apartment building where residents are living. An old man is in the center.

"Thank you for your hard work" "I've troubled you until now" "Take a good rest once you've returned home"

I spoke.

"It sounds like a farewell party. Do you let them retire once they've grown old?"

The Hell Lord protrudes his chest and laughs.

"*Fuhaha*, after they've been like slaves for many years and put to work, they are given a small amount of money and then are thrown out, getting strayed on the streets! They can live the rest of their lives as vagabonds!"

"You're even giving retirement money!? How far does your dreadfulness reach...?!"

Then the residents approached and knelt.

The retiring old man speaks.

"Lord-sama!"

"Hm? What is it?"

"I'll now bid farewell to the dreadful days, these were really hellish days."

"**Fuhaha!* This is this world's hell after all. Of course it's dreadful, right?"

"""Yes! It's extremely dreadful!"""

The residents spoke in unison. Everyone was vividly smiling.

I was astonished when I saw that scene.

--Damn.

That guy, is extremely loved.

Or rather, shouldn't this be natural? Such high treatment can't even be seen in Japan.

I'd certainly receive their grudge if I'd kill the Hell Lord.

Moreover, there seem to be about 4000 people here from what I heard earlier.

It might be the end if I'd buy the grudge of 4000 people and a mixture of truth and fiction spreads around.

Rumors might spread with me being the villain who killed the

non-resisting Hell Lord.

Even if each one of them told the story to five others, that would

already make 20000 people.

Rumors are accompanied with exaggerations, and it wouldn't be long

until it spreads throughout the country.

As a conclusion, I can't kill him.

The Demon Lord must have come to the same conclusion.

Vanus also needs believers.

It's not that he acknowledged his strength but he was unable to

bare his fangs at him because of the possible significant decrease

in believers.

One of the residents looked at us.

"Lord-sama, that person is?"

"He seems to be a hero."

"""Eeeh!?"

The residents stood up and gushed around me.

"Hero-sama, please! This is a very dreadful place!"

"We're alright, so please escape somehow, Hero-sama!"

"Lord-sama is a dreadful person! Please hurry and run away!"

Everyone desperately pleads.

It seems that they don't want to lose this environment.

Well, of course. They are working in shifts, have a worker's

accident insurance, maternity leave, physical examination and

retirement money. Moreover, they can do jobs that suit their

talents.

There are no bonuses indeed, but it seems that they are getting

rewards when the vegetables, goods and so on have fetched high

prices.

I don't know of any other place in this world where employment has

been perfected to that extent.

Only the Hell Lord is loudly laughing when he's looking at that

scene.

"*Kuhaha!* That's good, cry and scream! Cling to that fleeting hope!"

--That guy, he's really thinking that he's creating a hell in this world from the bottom of his heart.

It's a paradise no matter how you look at it. The people are thanking him honestly.

I urge the residents to stop.

"I got it, I got it. I'll think about running away."

"""Thank you, Hero-sama!""""

The people are so happy that they shed tears.

Nevertheless, I have to recover the egg.

If I can't take him down I'll have to negotiate.

However, the Hell Lord and this village might get attacked if he

gives the egg, that was entrusted to him by the Demon Lord's army, to me.

The Hell Lord spoke while I was in thoughts.

"How was it? Did the dreadfulness break your hearts? Well then, now that you're stricken with fear it's time for you to leave this world. Follow me!"

The Hell Lord walks ahead while spreading his mantle.

It seems that we'll fight.

If you're injured, Energy Drain will mean instant death. I'm alright, but Celica and Minya will be in danger.

That said, it would be bad if I'd take him down. It'll bring bad reputation.

Should I silence all residence to prevent that?

But then I'd probably become an evil god or a god of calamity if I'd take such inhumane actions.

I spoke to the Hell Lord who was walking ahead.

"Lord. I'm a little thirsty. How about having a talk while having a

drink?"

"Heh. A drink before a fight? --Or rather, a last supper? Very well, be thankful to my benevolence. Let's head to the reception room first."

I was still thinking about how to get the egg. Celica, who was walking beside me, looked worried and held onto my arm with her hand. She seems have the same thoughts. Whether it won't be bad to defeat him.

I return a silent nod while looking in her blue eyes. Her supple fingertips are transmitting a gentle warmth.

Chapter 99: Negotiation with the Hell Lord!

We're inside the castle, in a bright and spacious reception room.

We sat side by side on the sofa and the Hell Lord sat opposite to us.

The butler stands at the wall.

Juice and wine are placed on the table.

The taste is magnificent.

Celica exclams in admiration as she looks over the furniture.

"I've never seen such wonderful things before."

"*Fuhaha*, you can tell? I had them made at the workshops here.

Isn't the radiance of people who have not only their blood but also their talent squeezed out of them beautiful!? *Fuhaha*" Even though the persons involved seemed rather pleased and encouraged themselves with "Let's do something worthy of Lord-sama!" when we observed them earlier. It seems to be an honor for them if their works are used to decorate the castle. I won't say anything anymore.

I took a sip of the juice and spoke.

"By the way, Lord. Won't you negotiate?"

"About what? There's nothing of equivalent value to the egg. All you can try is getting it by force!"

I gazed into the Hell Lord's red eyes as I spoke.

"There is. I can offer a safe place, food provisions and information for making the hell even more dreadful."

The lord raises his right eyebrow.

"Heh... even, more dreadful, you say?"

--Did he take the bait?

"Ah, I noticed it when we looked around your hell. It still seems rather mild."

"Wh-What was that!? Are you saying that you could make it more hellish than me!? Tell me!"

"I could tell you if you promise to give me the egg. --But maybe I should tell you first. Then you can decide whether or not it's of high enough value. --You can bet on your pride."

"Fine with me... I'll hand over the egg if I approve of it-- and if not I'll receive your life."

The Hell Lord raised the corners of his mouth while he glared at me and laughed. His sharp canines are shining.

--It's my victory!

I spoke while hiding my smile.

"That condition doesn't matter. --First is, let's see..."

"What!? 'First', you say!? Does that mean that you have more than one!?"

"I have several ideas. I guess first would be a pension system."

"Pension? What's that?"

"You deduct a fixed amount from their salary to save it and then give them half the amount of their salary after retirement every month. The age should be depending on race, but about 65 years for humans."

"Hmm...is that really hellish? Isn't this just giving the people a peace of mind regarding their future?"

"You lack imagination, Lord! All of the working people will think about how long they'll live!"

"Ha, I see! Not only will I be able to deduce from the already

small payment with with the sweet words, that it will be for their future, but it'll also torment them further! Moreover, they'll ask themselves whether they'll ever receive it!"

"That's right, people become dejected when thinking about getting older! And after they've become 65 years old, they'll permanently wonder how long they still have to live to receive it."

"They are driven into despair while receiving hope! To think of something that dreadful!"

I broadly grinned.

"And that's not all. You can build a senior citizens' home."

"A senior citizens' home? From the word, does that mean it's a place where old people live? Isn't this just giving them a place to live in peace...?"

"This is the hell right? Don't all the people want to escape from here?"

"Obviously. But it's impossible for anyone to flee because it's surrounded by the poisonous swamp, *kukuku*"

"Then, do you know what tortures them the most after they tried to escape?"

"That's of course, when they are caught by the pursuers and brought back, isn't it?"

With a *tsk tsk tsk*, I waved my raised finger.

"You're naive, Lord. That's just secondary. What tortures them the most is the moment they realize that they don't have any other choice but to return to the hell on their own two feet. That despair is unfathomable! Yes, and now think of the moment when the old people who are thrown out realize that they don't have any other place to go but to go to the senior citizen's home! Just when

they think that the exploitation of their lives has finally ended,
they'll have to return at the end to be exploited again!

The Hell Lord opened his eyes wide as he was taken aback.

"Wow-! What a dreadful thing you came up with! Certainly when thinking about it from that point of view that's even more heart crushing than bringing escapees back! There's no bigger humiliation and sense of helplessness!"

"Also you could take a huge sum of money as boarding-expenses that they have to pay from the retirement money."

"That despair... it's just right for this world's hell!"

The Hell Lord was trembling and his eyes were sparkling.

I speak.

"And next, how about long holidays of about ten days?"

"Th-There's still more?! --Long holidays? That again seems to have a deeper meaning behind it I guess?"

"Of course! What are they going to do when people receive long holidays?"

"Won't they be pleased? They might play or travel. ...I see, they'll suffer from the difference once they return to their usual lives. Is it along those lines?"

"Overall that's it. --However! People are living beings who forget things they aren't doing continuously. For example a swordsman needs a week to be on the same level as before when he hasn't trained for three days. How many months might it take for craftsmen to recover when they took even ten days off?! They'll have to work hard from scratch on things that they were able to do before by the end of the holiday!"

"*Oooh! That's despair! Moreover, the despair might be immeasurable right after having enjoyed holidays! That's truly, hellish!"

"It should be done once every half year, around summer and winter.

Well, it shouldn't be done if you don't want to have a decline in quality of the produced goods though."

"No, I don't do it for profit and only let them work to receive the suffering of the hell.-- *kukuku*, now I'm looking forward to it."

The Hell Lord snickered evilly.

Celica, who sat next to me, smiled from astonishment.

"As expected of you, Keika-sama. To have even thought that far."

"Well, I'm a hero after all."

"It's enviable that is seems to be even better than Edelstein."

A hint of grief could be seen in her smile as she said this.

I silently took her hand and stroked it gently. She grabs my fingers tightly.

The Hell Lord raised his head and had a large smile floating on his face.

"I should run this from next year on."

I smile back.

"Oh. Does that mean that you'll adopt my ideas? I can get the egg then?"

Rather than my own ideas, it was knowledge of Japan. It won't contemplate about it though.

The Hell Lord suddenly frowned.

"Certainly, I don't mind... but, I don't really want to become hostile to the Demon Lord's army."

"Even though you are that strong? The Demon Lord can't move at the moment, so you might even be able to win."

"Yes. I know that. However, their supreme commander is Gerdolf,

right? I have a bad compatibility with him."

"Compatibility?"

"That guy is a Necromancer after all. My Energy Drain and Instant Death are completely useless. Moreover, he has the ability to produce an endless amount of dead souls. He's extremely hard to fight."

"I see. He had such an ability, huh? --In that case, I can introduce you to a safe place."

"Heh, where is it?"

"It's the dragon dungeon in the mountain to the west. The dragon who is the dungeon master is an acquaintance. If I remember correctly there is a huge, square floor of about ten kilometers where everyone could move to when the environment is adjusted."

--Moreover, I'll also get a floor boss if they'd move there! I can aim for a higher ranking in the contest. It's two birds with one stone.

The dragon should cooperate if it's for her eggs.

The Hell Lord put his hand at his chin and made a sullen face.

"But there are 4000 people here, right? It would take considerable effort just to move them."

"It should be possible to prepare a castle, houses, a field and livestock. You don't really have to abandon this place. And once I've defeated the Demon Lord you can come back."

"I see. That's what you meant with a safe place and food provisions, huh."

I shook my head. My black hair sways.

"No, I meant a different kind of food."

"Hm? What do you mean?"

"You're quite slim, you're probably lacking of blood, right? I'll offer that blood. The blood can be conserved when taken, right?"

"I can't really say that I have enough... and I certainly would like to receive some... but, is it alright for a hero to do that?"

"I can do it precisely because I'm a hero. There won't be any complaints if I say that it's for health examinations. And if there aren't any problems it could be done at all villages in the country. Please teach us how you do it."

The Hell Lord has his arms folded and is deep in thoughts. An intellectual light burns in his red eyes, probably because he considers the advantages and disadvantages.

"...It might be possible if it's a dungeon made by the Creation God... The possibility to defeat the Demon Lord is low... but if it's that dungeon even the Demon Lord shouldn't be able to get a hold of it. It's safer than this place... also I could build a relationship with the dragon... Yeah, it's not bad."

"Do we have a deal then?"

"Yes, please wait a moment-- hey, Murat. Bring the egg from my bedroom."

"Yes, Lord-sama."

The butler called Murat bowed politely and left the reception room.

The Hell Lord looks at me and speaks.

"Hero, I haven't asked your name yet."

"I'm Keika."

"Keika, huh. I'm thankful for the ideas to make the hell even more

terrifying. It would have taken decades for me to think that up."

"I don't mind."

The Hell Lord stretched out his glove-wearing hand above the table.

I took his hand and we shook hands.

Celica next to me let out a sigh of relief.

The butler returned with the egg. It wasn't just white and black, but also colored green and golden.

"Lord-sama, I've brought it."

"Thanks for the trouble. Hand it over to Keika."

"Yes!"

As ordered, the butler presents it to me.

I took the egg and examined it. It's round like a bowling ball.

"...it has several colors, huh."

"I was told that only I should warm it. Isn't it normal to assume that something is up with it? Hence I let my subordinates warm it to examine whether it won't explode or something. It was quite troubling."

"Troubling? Did something happen?"

"No, but the subordinates and residents both wanted to warm it, which caused quite the disturbance. It seems that they wanted to die to escape from the hell. However, at the end it was futile. It was quite a sight when they realized that it was harmless. Stricken from grief they fell to their knees and shed tears! *Fuhaha*" No matter how you think about it, didn't the people want to sacrifice themselves for the Hell Lord when they thought that it would explode? And the tears were most likely tears of joy when

they realized that the Hell Lord was safe.
--Just how loved is this guy?
Hm, I see! It might be because he is so dearly loved that he earned
the "Demon God"-status!
But a Demon God and a vampire. It's a little frightening not to
know how this will turn out in the future.
I couldn't do anything but to praise him with a bitter smile.
"As expected of you, Lord, you're quite cautious. Did you learn
something from it?"
"It seems that it changes its color depending on race and
attributes. It'll become black when held by a demon, green from the
wind attribute and red from the fire attribute. Earth is yellow.
And it seems to become golden when it's warmed by the
'Light'-attribute."
"Heh...hm? There are people with the 'Light'-attribute here?"
"The Vanus Church's sinner system isn't incorporated here after
all. Rather, there are families, who fled and then moved here to
protect their children-- and then they can't escape from his hell
anymore, *fuhaha*"
"--! To celebrate our deal, I'd like to send a bronze statue of me
to this hell."
"That's no good. Wouldn't that give them hope?"
"Don't you think that they would feel despair every day if there
would be a hero's statue that gives them hope?"
"I see! Even though they'd believe in a hero, at the end of the day
it wouldn't change the fact that they are in hell! ...You really
think of ideas to play with the people's hearts. You're so vicious
that one might not think that you are a hero!"
"*Fufun*, I'll take that as a compliment."

I boldly laughed. Because I might gain some more believers with the "Light"-attribute.

However, it's still only the seeding stage.

In order to grasp the hearts of the residents of this hell, I'll

have to get along with the lord.

But how can I improve our relationship? A true ancestor vampire and a hero. It's like water and oil.

After that I handed the egg to Lapisia.

"Don't let it fall"

"Yup, I'll keep it warm!"

Lapisia smiled while holding the egg with her thin arms.

"Well then, thank you for your help. Next I'll go to the remote continents, so I'll make the arrangements after I'm back."

"I'll also make preparations. I'll let you know when I'm done. Were should I contact you?"

"Either at Kynmerick's inn at the capital or at Keika village, which is to the north of the capital and managed by me."

"Oh. A village?"

"To be honest, it's losing against you at this stage. ...Please visit it in half a year and look at it yourself!"

"Kukuku, I look forward to it. By the way, for how long are you managing it?"

"It's still only a few month now."

"Heh! It took me 90 years to create this hell. I don't think that it can compete in only half a year."

"90 years--! No, I can do it. If it's me, I'll win."

"You don't say. Very well, let me see it one day. Well then--"

The Hell Lord swung his mantle and dashingly stood up.

Celica respectfully lowers her head.

"Well then, Lord-sama, we'll excuse ourselves. Thank you very much

for receiving us on our sudden visit. The hell is even more dreadful than I thought when I saw it for the first time."

"Hm? -- *Fuhaha*, it's only natural! My heart is vast after all!"

You can come again to look at the hell!"

"Yes, Lord-sama"

We also stand up.

Minya's black hair swayed as she bowed.

"Thank you for the treat."

"The egg, thank you!"

Lapisia also said goodbye and we left the castle.

Celica murmured while we walked through the poisonous swamp.

"Even though he's a demon, he's very different."

"Well, the person in question seriously thinks that what he does is bad."

"*Fufu*, please give your best as well, Keika-sama."

"That's right. Keika Village won't be defeated."

If I create an environment that goes beyond that hell, I'll

certainly develop a deep relationship with the lord, and the residents here should acknowledge me as a hero.

The country's laws might be a hindrance though.

Minya, who walks behind me, speaks.

"That juice, there were three types of citrus fruits in it. They

brought out each others taste and it was very delicious."

"Heh. The sweetness and sourness created a quite complex taste, huh."

"Let's do our best and make something even better."

"The development of a food culture is proof of a rich livelihood.

As expected of the lord."

"Moreover, there were beastfolks whose number should have been lower. They've fled to here."

"Yeah. It might act as a refuge for humans and demons."

"Someday, I will ..."

Celica swallowed the rest. She probably wanted to say "rebuild my country as well".

"Leave it to me"

I stroked Celica 's head.

Thus we headed to the large river to the west, and for some reason, the conversation we had during the trip was like one you'd have when returning from an amusement park.

Chapter 100: Ship and escort

The port town Doruas.

Sea birds are flying and chirping in the morning.

A dry dock was set a little apart from the wharf. It was a place

were ships were built and repaired, and there was a giant pool of water for ships to go into. Something like big warehouses can also be seen.

The water is currently drained and work is underway.

There are people who are removing shellfish that stick to the

ship's bottom and laborers who are applying paint.

A huge paddle wheel is hanging from a crane.

A tall man with black hair gives orders while he looks at the blueprints.

"Please make sure that the paddle wheel is in the center of the hull. Otherwise there's an eighty percent chance that it will effect the turning. Also take care that it is exactly half below the water line."

"Fuu". He combs his long, black hair upwards and takes a deep breath.

The one giving the instructions was Dark.

Tilt also helped with the remodeling work. He easily carried pillar-like timbers on his shoulders with his small body.

I gaze at that scene from the side. Celica and the others aren't with me because they went to run errands for Madam.

Nevertheless, the decision not to use screws seems to have been right. The actual crafting skills haven't yet reached that level and it would've taken time to construct a ship for it from

scratch.

We were currently remodeling an old ship that I had received from the king.

The total length of the ship is about 30 meters. It's a type with two masts that can be operated by a few sailors.

Usually the masts aren't erected. They are only added to move the ship in the emergency that the paddle wheels would break.

It'll be finished once the paddle wheels' axis of revolution is connected to the ship's helm.

It looks like it can launch today or tomorrow.

While I gaze at the scene, an armor-wearing young man with blue hair comes to my side. He's completely covered by a robe and wears a mask that hides his eyes.

"Keika-san, it should be ready soon."

"Ah, Leo. I haven't seen you around. Did something happen?"

"I heard at a bar that a village that is slightly away from here was troubled by demons. I went to exterminate them. I properly used your name."

"...Thank you, at least that's what I want to say. But aren't you overdoing it?"

"What do you mean?"

"I received a very warm welcome by the villages I went through, and I often heard things like 'So you're the masked hero-sama'."

"Fufu. That was Dark's idea. I can switch to something else if you don't like it."

Leo's white teeth shone as he broadly smiled.

"Well, I guess it's fine. --But, you probably did something extraordinary at the fishing villages, didn't you?"

"I only exterminated some half-fishfolks who kidnapped girls from the villages to breed with them. I only told them your name and

left after I rescued everyone."

"Oh... that was all? To receive such a welcome just by
that..."

I recall the villages. The reception was almost crazy. Especially
the women gave me hot gazes.

Leo is in thoughts as he turns his wisdom-gleaming eyes behind the
mask to the ground.

"Let's see... I have some special methods. When women tell me that
they want to know my name, I answer with 'Due to circumstances I
can't show it openly', and when I leave, I only turn around once to
say 'I'm Hero Keika. But you're better off to forget it by
tomorrow', and then I vanish into the darkness."

"I-Isn't that just too cool!? They'll fall in love, won't
they!?"

"Do you think so? According to Dark, there's a 99% percent chance
that they'll completely forget the name when they can't associate
it with a face if I don't do at least that much."

"I see. You simply play the part without any ill means,
huh..."

--Moreover, he doesn't lose any vigor even when he's wearing a
mask, so the effect should be outstanding.

I instinctively looked over to Dark, who was giving out
instructions on the ship.

When he noticed my gaze, he pushed up his glasses and
sneered.

Leo sounds worried.

"Is that bad? Should I do it more normal?"
"...no, it's fine. Please stay with that. But I'm glad that you've
told me about it. I didn't think that you'd go that far."

"Very well then. I'll continue with that. Then, I should tell you also about the other patterns."

"Do you have more?"

According to Leo, he had a bunch of different patterns to deal with various situations, for example if he'd be pressed for marriage, if he'd be awarded with houses or plots of land, or if someone wanted to elope with him, saying things like "I don't care where I go as long as I'm with you".

All of the patterns were quite pompous, but if Leo does it, it doesn't feel conceited at all.

I pressed my finger against my forehead while I spoke.

"Understood. I'll deal with the situations accordingly from now on."

"Yes, please do so."

The blue eyes under the mask were smiling.

I forcibly changed the topic since the mood became somewhat strange.

"But, to think that the half-fishfolks are doing such things, it seems that the demons who live in the sea also have it quite hard."

"Yes, apparently each clan and race is in the state of struggling for power since the death of Evil Squid. They'll probably continue to kill each other until the next ruler over the sea is born."

It was like an evolutionary cycle that has started. Just like the rats in the Dragon Dungeon that devoured each other until the King Rat has been born. And this happens throughout the ocean.

By the way, it seems that Evil Squid had emerged from the chaos

that sprung forth after Hero Lazan defeated Meteor Whale. Strength and wisdom should be necessary to struggle to the bitter end. He was certainly different when compared to the other Four Heavenly Kings.

"I heard that thanks to that, the rate at which ships are attacked has sharply decreased and the people are thankful for that."

"You're right. And even if a new ruler is born, it'll still take several years, so it should be calm for a while."

"Ah, that's right! Why don't you come with us to the frontier continents?"

"Hmm, is that a good idea? I heard that there are only demons at the remote continents. And since you go there it might be better for me to continue to go around and help the villages."

"So you think so? By the way, do you have enough funds to finance your activities?"

"Yes, not only do I take the requests for work but there are also plenty of materials from the killed monsters as well."

"Is that so? Please tell me if you haven't enough. ...I also don't have much though."

I don't know the detailed financial situation since I left the management of the money to Celica.

Leo's hair swayed as he bowed his head.

"Yes, Keika-san. Thank you for your concern."

--Then.

From the sea side of the dock, from above the flood gate that faced the sea, someone was peeking inside.

Beautiful silver hair and red eyes. It was leturia with her white, transparent-like skin. Since she had only put her hands on top of the flood gate, the lower part of her serpent-body couldn't be

seen.

The workers were surprised for a moment when they noticed her sudden appearance, but soon returned to their respective work.

It seems that they got used to the Naga.

Among them is a young man who waves at Ieturia with his hand and invites her with "Ii-chan, how about going for a drink tonight?".

He was quickly rejected.

From what I've seen thus far, it seems that the relationship between the Naga and the humans has improved.

They are on a good way.

Leo and I walked to the flood gate.

Ieturia was intently looking at the ship with keen interest as it was remodeled.

"What's wrong, Ieturia? Did something happen?"

"Ah no, Keika-sama. You're going to the neighboring continent next, right?"

"That's right."

"Won't it be better to take some Naga with you as an escort?"

"I see. But won't it cause problems when the high speed ships increase?"

"Not at all. There are still 15 Naga remaining."

I'm in thoughts while having my arms folded.

"Hmm. At first glance it seems to be a good plan... but, I don't plan on taking any rests this time. Moreover, it's too far. I should refrain from it."

"Is that so. We are still okay without any sleep for about a week though. But if you say so we'll accept it."

"Isn't there any work as escorts for other ocean-going ships? Maybe you can do that when the Naga increase further."

Then Ieturia spoke.

"Actually, I brought up the topic because we received a request for an escort. But we had a discussion with everyone and thought that we should first offer our help to you rather than working for someone else, since we're indebted to you."

"Oh-, isn't that fine? It's a new field of work for you. By any chance, can you give me some details?"

"It's an escort to the Sugar Archipelago."

Leo adds from the side.

"It's about five days to the southwest from Doruas. White sugar is produced there."

"Yes. It seems that grain is brought there from here. It seems that only an insufficient amount of food has arrived there since there were so many demons until now."

"I see. Then you should give that precedence to make sure that the food gets delivered. And don't forget to spread my name... That's it! Leo, why don't you go with them?"

"It doesn't sound like a bad idea. There are most likely problems at the Sugar Archipelago as well."

"But, is it really alright for a Naga not to sleep for a week? In that case I'd like to have someone to keep watch, Ieturia."

"Alright. I'll relay it to Driad. --You also take care,
Keika-sama."

Ieturia turns her white limb around and jumps into the sea. Her silver hair glittered as it received the sunlight.

At that time, a loud *gakonn!*-sound echoed from the direction of the ship.

When I looked, the paddle wheel was about to be connected to the axis that came out from the ship's center.

Leo mutters.

"I've never seen anything like that, the ship looks quite cool,
doesn't it."

"Yeah, its fate is to be quickly superseded by other technologies
though, but it's cool nonetheless."

"Is that so... I'm glad to see it with my own eyes."

"I guess so."

After looking at the ship for a while I left this place to Leo's
party and went back to the inn.

Chapter 101: Maiden voyage

The sunlight falls onto the harbor in the morning.
The paddle steamer was landed at the quay and goods were carried
inside.

I met with Driad while the sea breeze toyed with everyone's
hair.

"How's business, Driad?"
"It's going very well. The Naga have increased and I'm thinking
about expanding to escorts for ships in addition to the high speed
ships. --Ah, here's this month's share, 15 big gold coins."

"Oh? The remaining money for the slaves still has to be paid, is
this alright?"

"That money has already been deduced from it. The actual income was
25. Everything should be paid back to you in ten months."

"Does it yield such a high profit?"
"Yes, the local transportation is doing very well and the number of
customers steadily increases."

"It's the Hero Keika Transportation after all. The name seems to
sell quite well."

Then Driad introduced a girl whose upper half of her body could be
seen next to him. She's a little girl of about eight years.

"This is Nana, the Naga who will accompany you on your trip this
time."

"I'll be in your care, Hero-sama."
The girl lowered her head. Her voice was high but soft.
She has brown hair, a tanned skin and few scales. Her lower body is
- of course - that of a snake. She's still very young and has a

length of about 2.5 meters. She wears a breastplate and a skirt.

"Yes, I'll be counting on you as a lookout... but, is it really okay for a young child like you?"

"E-Ehm... I-If it's just watch-keeping, it's fine. I'm of the Naga race after all."

"Is that so?"

"Yes! As for us Naga, the younger we are the less we are sleeping.

The sleeping time increases when we grow into adults."

"Oh, then it's the opposite of humans? Humans are sleeping the most when they are babies and then the sleeping time decreases as they become adults."

"I think that humans are illogical. It's strange that children who have to learn all kinds of things need so much sleep."

"That makes sense from that point of view. By the way, Nana, how long can you stay up?"

"I'm awake for two to three weeks."

"That's plenty. I'll rely on you to keep watch."

"Yes! I'll work hard!"

Nana's shoulder-long brown hair swayed when she braced herself.

"Well then, I guess it's time to go on board."

I said goodbye to Driad and climbed the ramp. Nana follows by swiftly wriggling her snake-body.

I introduced Nana to the about 15 sailors after we had boarded.

After that I went to Celica who was at the bow of the ship. She pressed her blond hair down that was being disheveled by the wind and gazed at the harbor and the ocean.

"Is anything wrong, Celica?"

"No, it's just that I'd never have imagined to ever head to the neighboring continent. I'm a little nervous."

--She was probably barely able to go outside as a princess.

"Aren't you happy, Celica?"

"It's only possible because I was able to meet you,

Keika-sama."

"I'll definitely protect you, so don't worry."

"Yes~!"

She squeezed her blue eyes as she smiled.

The captain shouts from the stern.

"Alright, is everything ready!? Depart!"

The ramp is lifted and the sailors are busily moving around.

Making the sound of *saasaa*, the paddle wheels start to

spin.

Celica mutters.

"So we departed, huh... we're separating from the shore."

"Everything seems to work well."

When I leaned out from the side of the boat and looked at the

wharf, I could see Ieturia with her white body and three men who were wearing masks.

Leo will go to the Sugar Archipelago next.

I lightly waved my hand.

"See you!"

I couldn't hear their voices but they responded by waving their hands in the same way.

=====

Several days after departure.

The sea wind blows at dusk and no matter in which direction you look, there's only the blue ocean.

The voyage progressed smoothly.

The sound of *basha basha* resounds from the paddle wheels.

On the way we were attacked by flying fish with blade-like fins and

squid-like demons with spears, but thanks to the Naga Nana, who informed us of them before they approached, we were able to easily repulse them. Thanks to that we had a surplus of food. By the way, we've erected one mast for the lookout. At its highest spot, Nana has coiled her serpent body around the mast.

The scene resembled a green boa that is coiled around a twig that I've seen a long time ago.

Probably because the sailors have gotten used to the Naga, they didn't avoid her.

The sailors climbed the mast like monkeys to deliver her meals to her.

Seeing that everything was alright on deck, I returned back to my room.

I shared a double room with Celica. Even though it was small, it was furnished with a bed and a table.

Celica was absent. It seems that she went to dinner.

I lie down on the bed.

I was relieved that we weren't attacked by any large monsters that could have destroyed the ship.

They are most likely involved in the battle for supremacy in the ocean.

--Then.

I suddenly heard the sound of clanking money close to my ear. I take a breath. I look at the floor but I didn't drop any money.

I looked into the direction of Keika Village with "Clairvoyance".

There were a parent and a child who were praying in front of the front shrine with their hands put together. A father who seemed to

be a farmer and a young girl.
--Oh! The first visitors to my shrine!
I soon heard their wishes.
"Please give us a good harvest next year as well. Please let my
family grow up healthy."
Yeah. Your wish has reached me.
The girl also desperately wishes.
"Please make me smarter."
Maybe I should take a look with "Truth Sight" first before making
any promises. I'd be disqualified as a god to accept that wish if
she'd be a genuine idiot.

[Status]

Name: Lala
Gender: Female
Age: 9
Race: Human
Job: Villager
Class: Healer Lv1 Farmer Lv5 Grazing Lv3
Attributes: "Grace"
Physical Strength: 4 (+1) Max 30
Agility: 5 (+1) Max 40
Magical Strength: 7 (+2) Max 65
Wisdom: 15 (+6) Max 91
Luck: 6 (+1) Max 30

Wisdom growth +6!?
She'll certainly become smart even if I don't do anything. It's
just that her main class is Healer and unless she won't go into
that direction the level won't rise.
I wonder how far it would rise with only leveling as a Farmer?
There don't seem to be any places to study... I guess I should

start with the construction of a school soon.

--*Ehem*, in my name of Keika Hiko-no-Mikoto, I clearly heard your wish.

I'll keep it in the back of my mind.

After that, they went to the shop that was tended to by Fal and bought talismans.

Moreover a large quantity. They've probably bought about 30.

Listening to them with "Attentive Ears", they seem to come from a village in the west of the kingdom and they bought them for everyone in the village. Apparently they have some time to spare after the harvest.

I'm happy because my believers are likely to increase.

After that, Celica returned and I embraced her.

Since I was happy I didn't feel like sleeping alone.

Hence I went to sleep, not minding the embarrassed Celica, who exclaimed "Ah, Keika-samaaa" within my arms.

The softness of her slender limbs and plump breasts felt pleasant.

=====

Morning.

I awoke from the sound of scratching on glass.

It's the sound that's used by the Naga as alarm.

Nana, who's on lookout might have found something.

I jumped up and headed to the deck.

Celica, Minya and Lapisia followed behind.

The sun rises in the eastern sky.

A refreshing wind blew on deck.

I shout as I look up at the mast.

"Nana, what's wrong?"

"There are demons! I can see three! They are heading here to surround us!"

--Tsk. I clicked my tongue.

It'd be troublesome if a group of huge demons would attack the ship.

"How large are they?!"

"Let's see, about a human, they're smaller than me!"

"Hm? About a human?"

"A little bit smaller!"

I unsheathed my Tachi while I felt relieved that they weren't huge enemies.

I shout at the sailors.

"The same as usual, you'll only concentrate on defending yourself!

I'll defeat the demons!"

"Yes!" "We'll leave it to you!" "Be careful!"

I approach the side of the ship and look down at the ocean's surface.

White lines could be seen as they swam at the surface. The

child-like shadows approached with an amazing speed.

--Oh, it might be troubling if they'd attack the paddle wheels.

While I was pondering whether I should shoot some magic, a small shadow clung to a paddle wheel and came upwards.

Then, it jumped into my direction. Red hair flutters behind it.

It's a girl. She's almost nude, having only seaweed wrapped around her chest and hips. Her head is covered by a red, transparent jellyfish like a helmet.

She held a knife in her hand that seemed to have been carved out of a shellfish and was releasing a dull, rainbow-like color.

Even without looking at her status, it was clear that she was an insignificant demon.

I lifted my Tachi and took a stance.

I could defeat her with one strike.

I cited a spell and bestowed "Wind Blade Grant" to the Tachi.

I was waiting. I was sure that I could easily turn the tables on

her.

However, just before the girl entered my reach, she shouted with

her face distorted from anger.

"Take this, Heeero! I'll avenge my father!!"

"Eh!?"

I had a bad premonition and ended up not doing anything.

Her knife hit my neck.

"No!! Ke-Keika-samaaaa~!"

Celica's scream resounded above the deck under the endless, blue

sky.

Chapter 102: Jellyfish girl!

The ocean spread as far as one could see and was glowing white in
the morning sun.

On top of the paddle steamer.

I was stabbed by a girl whose head was covered by a red
jellyfish.

However, as time went by, the girl was trembling.

"Wh-Why, won't you die!!?"

"That's, because you're weak."

It's impossible with the strength of a mere demon to pierce the
skin of a god.

"Su-Such a...! I-If I don't do it, my sister, my brother, my mother
will...!"

The girl raises the knife once more, but I grab her hand.

"Too bad, but I won't die."

"No! Let go!"

The girl desperately struggled. She's kicking wildly with her feet
at me and the tentacles of the jellyfish on her head are hitting
me. However, it doesn't even hurt.

"It's futile. Just give up-- by the way, what's your father's
name?"

"It's Evil Squid! Dad was veeeery, veeeery strong and gentle!

...*Uwaaan!*"

Tears are spilling from her big eyes as she starts to cry.

--Ah, I guessed something like that. You're a jellyfish and not a
squid though."

"Sh-Shut up! All my siblings are squids, it's only I who resemble
mother!"

So there was something like that.

The girl continues to kick while she's crying.

Celica looked at me with a troubled face.

"Keika-sama, are your injuries okay? Also... what should be done with that child?"

"It doesn't even hurt. Let's see..."

--Should I kill her? She's shown disrespect against a god after all.

It's only natural that those who raise their hand against the gods are killed. Moreover, she's a demon.

And you can't complain if a hero defeats one of the Demon Lord's Four Heavenly Kings.

Or rather, the past me would've simply killed her without any further thoughts.

But, now it's bothering me.

Should I kill those who have a grudge against me without any further thoughts? Will I become a god that's respected by the people then?

Won't that lead to the same result as in the past?

I was troubled and scratched my cheek.

At that time, two small shadows appeared on the deck.

"L-Let go of our sister!" "Release her!"

They were a young boy and girl whose heads were covered with red jellyfishes.

They are tightly holding knives in their hands and dash towards me.

The caught girl has a desperate look floating on her face.

"Marin! Plura! Don't come!"

The bodies of the two children shivered.

At that moment, the about three years old girl stumbled.

"Plura!"

"U, U...ueeeeen!"

The boy rushes over to Plura, who started to cry after shell fell.

The boy helped Plura to stand up, but his face warped after being startled by the approaching Celica and looking at the girl who was caught by me.

"*Ueeeeen*, mom, dad! I'm scared!"

All of them started to cry in unison.

Now that I've made those young children cry I'm feeling like I'm the bad guy.

Celica frowned and was flustered from bewilderment.

Only Minya stays on alert and is prepared to make a preemptive strike.

Or rather, she's irritated and her black tail stands up.

She doesn't seem to be able to forgive those who aimed at my life.

There's no wavering at all. As expected of my Miko.

For now I took a look at the girl's status while I wasn't sure how to proceed further.

[Status]

Name: Luna

Gender: Female

Age: 6

Race: Jelly Mermaid (New Soft-Demon)

Job: Sea Warrior

Class: Assassin Lv3 Divine Beast Lv1

Attributes: "Darkness" "Moonlight" "Blue Wave"

State: In the shoot-out battle for evolution (compulsory participation)

Attack strength: 110

Defense strength: 140

Vitality: 400

Mental strength 200

[Skills]

Sting: Attack with a sword

Shadow Swim: Dive and swim within shadows and darkness. Not usable without any shadows.

[Data]

Water attribute resistance: low

...I see. A new species, huh?

Those three might actually be the only ones.

She's weak at the moment, but she might get really strong if she'd

train. From her looks I thought her to be 10 years old, but she's

actually younger. Demons are a fast growing race after all.

Something peeked my interest when glimpsing at her status.

"So you have to fight, huh. And although you are a Demon you're a

Divine Beast? What race is your mother? Is she some weird monster?"

"That's mean! How can you say that!? Mother is an extremely beautiful mermaid!"

"Heh. So that's why you're a Jelly Mermaid, huh? Where's your mother?"

"Ugh..."

The girl stopped to cry and spoke with a clogged voice.

"What's wrong?"

"Mother went, back to the village, but was arrested. They said that she'd work together with demons..."

"I see, ...well, and then?"

"That's why, if I defeat the hero, I'll become the number one of the ocean! Then I'll take her back with my subordinates!"

"I see, so that's your reason. It's impossible though."

"I'm the daughter of my father! I won't be defeated by something

like a hero!"

"Haa", I sighed.

"Evil Squid was extremely strong. And he wasn't only strong but also smart. And because of his loyalty to the Demon Lord, he even refused to become one of my comrades. We simply had different points of view. Hence I had to defeat him with my greatest technique."

That's why I don't have a bad conscience at all. I don't regret that I've killed him.

"Still, I wanted my father, to live! Absolutely, I'll never forgive you!!"

--Well, I guess it's obvious.

I spoke while I glared at the girl.

"Yes, resent me. Hate me. ...But, there's no way you could defeat me as you are now. Become stronger. Then, when you've become stronger than your father I'll be your opponent."

"That's, too late! Mother is...!"

Lapisia went to her while carrying the egg and patted the girl on her shoulder.

"It's alright! We'll let you meet your mother!"

"Re-Really...?"

"Yup! Keika is a hero after all!"

"...He-Heroes are the enemies of demons, I can't believe him!"

"Then, believe me!"

She looked into the girl's face with a bright smile.

They are about the same height. Only the part that's covered by the jellyfish is slightly higher.

Lapisia is also yearning for meeting her mother. She's probably sympathizing.

The girl had a tear-stained face and looked at Lapisia, me, her brother and sister and then at Lapisia again. Tears are piling up in her eyes.

Then she spoke.

"Please... save my mother..."

"Yup, got it! --It's okay, isn't it, Keika?"

I thought for a while.

However, the answer was clear from the start.

I'm a hero and a god, there's Lapisia, and if things should turn

really bad, I could summon the Ocean God Lilille.

And if everything goes smoothly, the mermaids might even become my believers.

To be honest, I'm not that confident that I could gather tens of thousands of believers within the year until the Demon Lord revives by just relying on humans. That's why I should also proactively look for believers in many other races.

"Alright. I'll save your mother. What's your name?"

"Are you really going to save her...? My name is Luna. And these are my brother Marin and my sister Plura. My mother's name is Christia."

"Well then, please guide us to the home of the mermaids. --Lapisia, please take care of Luna. You seem to get along."

"Yup! We're already friends! It's alright--"

Then, the moment when Lapisia's blue twin tails swayed when she nodded.

Giiii!

Suddenly, a shrill, earsplitting sound echoed above our heads.

Nana, who was watch-keeping, shouted.

"A very huge fish is approaching from south! It's flying!"

"What!?"

Riding on a water-pillar-like tornado, an about ten meters long

fish headed towards us. Its body shines silver as if it's completely made of iron and the nose resembles a four meters long and sharp sword. It looked like a swordfish.

Its eyes shone in a fierce red and it laughed haughtily.

"*Gyahaha!* Found you! Squid girl! Did you take refuge on a human ship? There's no use, I'll kill you and inherit your power! I'll be the next ruler!!"

I see, that's how it works, huh?

"*Hii!*, that's Sea Metal Gladius! He's targeting me all the

time... W-We have to escape!"

Luna swung her head around and was about to escape into the

opposite direction.

"There's no need to escape."

"Eh?"

I held my Tachi in one hand and stood on the railing.

"Stop the paddle wheels!"

"Roger!"

The sailors are moving in a panic.

I looked at it with "Truth Sight".

[Status]

Name: Sea Metal Gladius

Race: New Scale-Demon

Job: Company commander of the Demon Lord's army's naval force

Class: Demon Beast Lv45 Mad Swordsman Lv30

Attributes: "Violent Wind" "Darkness"

State: In the shoot-out battle for evolution (compulsory

participation)

Attack strength: 2500

Defense strength: 2800

Vitality: 1600

Mental strength: 700

[Skills]

Slash: Slash with a sword

Tornado Dive: Body blow while riding on a tornado

Divide Stream: Cuts in the range of several hundreds of meters by pouring magical power into a sword.

[Passive Skills]

Water attribute resistance (high)

Metal Coat: Increase in defense strength

High Power: Increased abilities

The swordfish approaches at an enormous speed as it rides on the tornado.

"Hm, you're not running away? I'll cut the ship straight in half!

There's nothing that I can't cut!"

"Yeah~. I don't worry if my opponent seems to be garbage like you."

"What was that?! Are you kidding me?! --'Divide Stream'!"

The metal swordfish jumped up to the sky and its sword nose shone intensely.

"Dieeeee!"

The huge sword is is swung downwards.

The slash is accompanied by a pressing wind.

Zack!

--However, the large sword vanished midway.

My Tachi severed the sword of the fish at its root.

"Wh-What!? --*Guboo!*"

I grabbed the guy at its gills and cut deep into the huge body. It

felt like cutting a log.

With a *dossa*, it hit the deck.

The swordfish was shedding blood but was still alive.

I looked at Luna.

"I'll let you finish him off."

"Eh!?"

"You want to get strong and avenge your father, right?"

"Su...Such a..."

Luna was trembling while holding the shellfish knife.

The swordfish seemed to understand the situation and began to spout coarse words.

"H-Hey, little miss! P-Please forgive me! See? I don't even have my sword anymore, right? Please!"

"Uuu..."

Luna frowned and was shivering.

"Hehe, yeah, that's right, please save me. ...Now that I take a closer look, aren't you quite cute? I'll teach you the pleasures of a woman, so save me! I'll love you so deeply that you'll forget everything!"

--Huh?"

Luna's trembling stopped. She made big eyes from astonishment.

"It'll be even better than when your father did it with a mermaid, so please overlook this, okay?"

--Is he an idiot?

I was amazed as I listened.

Luna's shivering began to change into a different kind.

The metal swordfish seemed to think that his words got through to her and spoke further.

"Someone like your father would've been no match for me, right? I'll show you my thanks if you let me go, with this body of mine, okay?"

"...Don't. ...Don't make fun of father!!!"

--'Wind Blade Grant'"

Luna charges towards the metal swordfish's throat with her whole body weight behind it. The shellfish knife shines green from my magic.

"Uwaaa! Stooooop!"

--*Zash!*

Red blood spouts like a fountain.

"Gyaaaa!"

The metal swordfish's fin violently hit the deck. However, since I and Lapisia held it down it was unable to move.

After cramping multiple times, it died.

The knife fell out of Luna's hand and dropped with a *clank* on the floor.

"Well done."

"...Father, I, did it..."

"Well then, we don't have any time to spare. Please guide us to the mermaid village."

"Ah, yes, I get it."

Minya gallantly walked over with her cat ears standing upright.

Then, she took off her her white robe as she walked, and the sun shone on her white skin and black bikini.

"I'll, gut it."

"Ah, I already guessed so. You stripped down quite dignified."

"Yup. It's a swim suit after all, so there's nothing to feel embarrassed about."

Wearing her black Hakama, she swung her knives with her two-sword-style.

Luna looked at me while she hugged her siblings.

"Are you, really a hero...?"

"Hm? Ah, yeah, and I want you to become strong."

"Why...?"

"There are several reasons, but mostly because Evil Squid was a good guy. It's respect for an opponent or something like that I guess..."

"...Someday, I'll definitely, be your opponent."

"I'm looking forward to that-- well then, please guide us."

I and Luna told the captain our destination.

The paddle wheels began to splash water again with *zaazaa* and we advanced towards the mermaid village.

As Luna leveled up, she learned the metal swordfish-skills "Tornado Dive", "Water attribute resistance" and "High Power". It seems that she can't learn race-specific skills like "Metal Coat".
Incidentally, Minya's level also rose.
By the way, the dinner was metal swordfish teriyaki.